



WNBA star Griner freed in swap for Russian arms dealer Bout



Cherelle Griner, wife of WNBA star Brittney Griner, speaks after President Joe Biden announced Brittney Griner's release in a prisoner swap with Russia, Thursday, Dec. 8, 2022, in the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington. Also attending are Secretary of State Antony Blinken, left, and Vice President Kamala Harris.

Associated Press

By ERIC TUCKER, MATTHEW LEE and ZEKE MILLER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Russia freed WNBA star Brittney Griner on Thursday in a high-profile prisoner exchange, as the U.S. released notorious Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout but failed to win freedom for another American, Paul Whelan, who has been jailed for nearly four years. The deal, the second in eight months amid tensions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine, secured the release of the most prominent American detained abroad and achieved a top goal for President Joe Biden. But it carried what U.S. officials described as a heavy price.

"She's safe, she's on a plane, she's on her way home," Biden said from the White House, where he was accompanied by Griner's wife, Cherelle, and administration

officials.

Biden's authorization to release Bout, the Russian felon once nicknamed "the Merchant of Death," underscored the heightened urgency that his administration faced to get Griner home, particularly after the recent resolution of her criminal case on drug charges and subsequent transfer to a penal colony. Griner, who also played pro basketball in Russia, was arrested at an airport there last February for bringing less than a gram of cannabis oil in vape cartridges into the country.

Griner is a two-time Olympic gold medalist, Baylor University All-American and Phoenix Mercury pro basketball star, whose arrest in February made her the most high-profile American jailed abroad.

Continued on Page 2

Hyro Oduber won the 'plane spotting' competition at the airport



Prime minister of Aruba met with prime minister of the Netherlands regarding slavery in the region



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WNBA star Griner freed in swap for Russian arms dealer Bout



Brittney Griner (15) runs up court during women's basketball gold medal game against Japan at the 2020 Summer Olympics on Aug. 8, 2021, in Saitama, Japan.

Associated Press

Continued from Front

Her status as an openly gay Black woman, locked up in a country where authorities have been hostile to the LGBTQ community, injected racial, gender and social dynamics into her legal saga and brought unprecedented attention to the population of wrongful detainees.

The Russian Foreign Ministry confirmed the swap, saying in a statement carried by Russian news agencies that the exchange took place in Abu-Dhabi and that Bout had been flown home.

Biden spoke with Griner who was at an airport in Abu-Dhabi after she was greeted by U.S. officials. She was expected to be back in the U.S. within 24 hours, Biden said. U.S. officials said she would be offered specialized medical services and counseling, but declined to go into specifics citing privacy concerns.

Both Russian and U.S. officials had conveyed cautious optimism in recent weeks after months of strained negotiations, with

Biden saying in November that he was hopeful that Russia would engage in a deal now that the midterm elections were completed. A top Russian official said last week that a deal was possible before year's end. Even so, the fact that the deal was a one-for-one swap was a surprise given that U.S. officials had for months expressed their determination to bring home both Griner and Paul Whelan, a Michigan corporate security executive jailed in Russia since December 2018 on espionage charges that his family and the U.S. government has said are baseless.

"We've not forgotten about Paul Whelan," Biden said. "We will keep negotiating in good faith for Paul's release."

U.S. officials said they did not see an immediate path to bringing about Whelan's release, saying Russia has treated his case differently because of the "sham espionage" charges against him.

Still, they said they believe communication channels with the Russians remain

open for negotiations for his freedom — though it was not clear what cost would need to be paid to secure it.

"We didn't want to lose the opportunity today to secure the release of one of them," said Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Whelan's brother David said in a statement he was "so glad" for Griner's release but also disappointed for his family. He credited the White House with giving the Whelan family advance notice and said he did not fault officials for making the deal.

"The Biden administration made the right decision to bring Ms. Griner home, and to make the deal that was possible, rather than waiting for one that wasn't going to happen," he said.

In releasing Bout, the U.S. freed a former Soviet Army lieutenant colonel whom the Justice Department once described as one of the world's most prolific arms dealers. He was arrested in Thailand in 2008 and extradited to the U.S. in 2010.

Bout, whose deeds were

featured in a Hollywood movie, was serving a 25-year sentence on charges that he conspired to sell tens of millions of dollars in weapons that U.S. officials said were to be used against Americans. Biden issued an executive grant of clemency to free the arms dealer from a federal prison in Illinois to effect the prisoner swap.

The deal drew criticism from some prominent Republicans, including House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, his party's nominee to become speaker once the GOP retakes control of the chamber in January.

"This is a gift to Vladimir Putin, and it endangers American lives," he said of Bout's release. "Leaving Paul Whelan behind for this is unconscionable."

The U.S.-Russia exchange was carried out despite deteriorating relations between the powers prompted by Moscow's war against Ukraine. The White House said the Ukrainian government was briefed on the agreement and that Kyiv was provided assurances that the terms were limited to the prisoner swap and would not impact U.S. support for Ukraine's defense.

Over the summer, the imprisonment of Americans produced a rare diplomatic opening, yielding the highest-level known contact between Washington and Moscow — a phone call between Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov — in more than five months.

In an extraordinary move during otherwise secret negotiations, Blinken revealed publicly in July that the U.S. had made a "substantial proposal" to Russia for Griner and Whelan. Though he did not specify the terms, people familiar with it said the U.S. had offered Bout.

Such a public overture drew a rebuke from the Russians, who said they preferred to resolve such cases in private, and carried the risk of weakening the U.S. government's negotiating hand for this and future deals by making

the administration appear too desperate. But the announcement was also meant to communicate to the public that Biden was doing what he could and to ensure pressure on the Russians.

Besides the efforts of U.S. officials, the release also followed months of back channel negotiations involving Bill Richardson, the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and a frequent emissary in hostage talks, and his top deputy, Mickey Bergman.

Following Griner's arrest at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport in February, she pleaded guilty in July, though still faced trial because admitting guilt in Russia's judicial system does not automatically end a case.

She acknowledged in court that she possessed the canisters with cannabis oil but said she had no criminal intent and their presence in her luggage was due to hasty packing.

Before being sentenced on Aug. 4 and receiving a punishment her lawyers said was out of line for the offense, an emotional Griner apologized "for my mistake that I made." She added: "I hope in your ruling it does not end my life." Her supporters had largely stayed quiet for weeks after her arrest, but that approach changed in May once the State Department designated her as unlawfully detained. A separate trade, Marine veteran Trevor Reed for Konstantin Yaroshenko, a Russian pilot convicted in the U.S. in a cocaine trafficking conspiracy, spurred hope that additional exchanges could be in the works.

Whelan has been held in Russia since December 2018. The U.S. government also classified him as wrongfully detained. He was sentenced in 2020 to 16 years in prison.

Whelan was not included in the Reed prisoner swap, escalating pressure on the Biden administration to ensure that any deal that brought home Griner also included him. □

Biden approval, views of economy steady, sour: AP-NORC poll

By HANNAH FINGERHUT

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fresh off his party's better-than-anticipated performance in the midterm elections, President Joe Biden is facing consistent but critical assessments of his leadership and the national economy.

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds 43% of U.S. adults say they approve of the way Biden is handling his job as president, while 55% disapprove. That's similar to October, just weeks before the Nov. 8 elections that most Americans considered pivotal for the country's future. Only about a quarter say the nation is headed in the right direction or the economy is in good condition. Both measures have been largely negative over the course of the year as inflation tightened its grip, but were more positive through much of Biden's first year in office.

Mishana Conlee said she tries to be optimistic about the coming year, but she thinks things are going to the gutter because "our president is incompetent" and not mentally fit for the White House. The 44-year-



President Joe Biden smiles as he speaks after touring the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company facility under construction in Phoenix, on Dec. 6, 2022.

Associated Press

old in South Bend, Indiana, said she's frustrated about rising expenses when she's living paycheck to paycheck as a dietary aide at a nursing home.

"The more I work, I just can't get ahead," Conlee said. "That's just all there is to it." She doesn't blame Biden for the state of inflation, but "I feel like he's not doing anything to change it," said Conlee, an independent who voted for former President Donald Trump. Biden's

"not doing us any good." The Biden administration in its second year in the White House relished economic growth, a series of legislative wins and relative success for the president's party in the midterms. But that has yet to translate to glowing reviews from a pessimistic public.

"I don't understand why his approval ratings are so low," said 56-year-old Sarah Apwisch, highlighting the administration's invest-

ments in infrastructure and computer chip technology. Apwisch recognizes that it's been "a tough year" and that prices are higher, but she's hopeful because of the midterm results as a Republican-turned-Democrat who worries about the "Make America Great Again" movement's influence on the GOP.

"We're headed in the right direction," said the Three Rivers, Michigan, resident who works for a market re-

search company's finance department. She is eager to see Democrats press forward on a wide-ranging agenda, including codifying abortion rights.

Even as Republicans took control of the House, Democrats defied historical precedent to stunt GOP gains and even improve their Senate majority, which was cemented with this week's runoff win for Sen. Raphael Warnock, the lone Democrat in Georgia this year to be elected statewide.

Glen McDaniel of Atlanta, who twice voted for Warnock, thinks the Biden administration has moved the country forward and weathered the economic storm as well as possible.

But McDaniel, a 70-year-old medical research scientist, also thinks the nation faces "social headwinds" that he wants Biden and the party to prioritize.

"I think that the Democrats can be a little bit more aggressive" in legislating on things like marriage equality, reproductive rights and voting reform, he said.

The poll shows majorities of Democrats and Republicans alike think things in the country are on the wrong track, likely for different reasons. □

Blinken confident in Finland, Sweden accession to NATO

By MATTHEW LEE

AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Thursday the United States is confident that Finland and Sweden will be approved soon for membership in NATO despite ratification delays in allies Turkey and Hungary.

After meeting his Finnish and Swedish counterparts on Thursday, Blinken said both countries had proved their bona fides to join the alliance, notably in joining NATO in providing support to Ukraine to counter Russia's invasion.

Nearly all of NATO's 30 members have already

approved Finland and Sweden's applications to join the alliance, which were made after Russia launched its war in Ukraine. Turkey and Hungary are the only two to not yet have ratified Finland and Sweden's accession.

"Both countries have taken significant, concrete actions to fulfill their commitments, including those related to the security concerns on the part of our ally, Turkey," Blinken said. "As their membership process continues, the United States is fully committed to Finland and Sweden's accession." But Blinken said he believed Turkey's con-

cerns, notably with Sweden over its past support for Kurdish groups that Ankara sees as a threat, would be overcome in the near future. Sweden this week extradited a convicted member of the Kurdish PKK militant group to Turkey. Hungary's parliament is expected to vote on NATO expansion early next year. "I'm confident that NATO will formally welcome Finland and Sweden as members soon," he told reporters at a joint news conference at the State Department with Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billstrom and Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto.



Secretary of State Antony Blinken listens as President Joe Biden announces WNBA star Brittney Griner's release in a prisoner swap with Russia, Thursday, Dec. 8, 2022, in the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington.

Associated Press

Blinken took the opportunity to say that Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to go to war with Ukraine had backfired if he truly intended to push back on NATO expansion.

"As Sweden and Finland prepare to join NATO, we know that he's failed at weakening our alliance," he said. "Indeed, he's only made NATO stronger and bigger." □

Awash in illegal marijuana, Oregon looks at toughening laws

By **ANDREW SELSKY**

Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. (AP) — In 2014, Oregon voters approved a ballot measure legalizing recreational marijuana after being told it would eliminate problems caused by “uncontrolled manufacture” of the drug. Illegal production of marijuana has instead exploded.

Oregon lawmakers, who have heard complaints from police, legal growers and others, are now looking at toughening laws against the outlaw growers. Oregon, one of the first states to legalize recreational marijuana, can be an object lesson for other states, including Maryland and Missouri, where voters legalized weed on Nov. 8. That raised the number of states that have approved marijuana’s recreational use to 21.

So far this year, police have seized over 105 tons (95 metric tons) of illegally grown marijuana in Oregon, according to the Oregon-Idaho High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area task force. That’s up from at least 9 tons (8 metric tons) in 2019.

The indoor and outdoor grows use massive amounts of water in drought-stricken areas, contaminate the environment and employ migrant laborers who live in squalid conditions.

A draft bill for Oregon’s



Josephine County Sheriff Dave Daniel stands amid the debris of plastic hoop houses destroyed by law enforcement, used to grow cannabis illegally, near Selma, Ore., June 16, 2021.

Associated Press

2023 legislative session that begins Jan. 17 would double the maximum prison sentence and fine to 10 years in prison and \$250,000 for unlawful manufacture involving more than 100 plants and possession in excess of 32 times the legal limits. Personal possession limits in Oregon are 2 ounces (57 grams) of marijuana in a public place and 8 ounces (227 grams) in a home.

The measure also holds people accountable for environmental damage and prohibits use of water at locations not licensed

for growing marijuana. Addressing immigrant labor, the draft bill makes it a crime for managers of an illegal grow site to confiscate a passport or immigration document, to threaten to report a person to a government agency for arrest or deportation, or withhold wages without lawful justification. Some parts of Oregon have seen record seizures as police raid plantation after plantation. Police say foreign criminal gangs have become involved, from Mexico, Russia, China and other countries.

A single raid in October

yielded 76,930 pounds (35,000 kilograms) of marijuana in Yamhill County, southwest of Portland, the largest pot bust on record in a county more renowned for its pinot noir wine.

“Investigators found the entire property had been converted to facilitate the growth, storage, processing, and packaging of marijuana to be shipped or transported out of the area,” the sheriff’s office said.

The street retail value of the marijuana in Oregon would be \$76 million while on the East Coast it would

be worth \$269 million, the sheriff’s office said.

Receipts at the property in rural Newberg, Oregon, showed wire transfers involving large amounts of money going from Oregon to the state of Michoacán in Mexico.

On Oct. 25, Oregon State Police, including SWAT officers, raided a property in southern Oregon’s Jackson County that had pot growing in greenhouses. They officers destroyed about 1,000 pounds (450 kilos) of illegal, processed marijuana and found the carcass of a black bear, along with firearms and three stolen vehicles.

The amount of illegal marijuana that law enforcement officers manage to intercept each year in Oregon is believed to be dwarfed by the uncounted tons that are smuggled out of state and sold for high profits. The 2014 Oregon voters’ pamphlet said legalization of recreational marijuana would “eliminate the problems caused by the prohibition and uncontrolled manufacture, delivery, and possession of marijuana within this state.” Anthony Johnson, who was the chief petitioner for Ballot Measure 91, acknowledged that legalization and the creation of a regulated industry from farm to customer has not stemmed the illegal grows. □

Appeals court allows New York to keep enforcing new gun law



A traffic sign on the corner of 42nd Street and 6th Avenue announces Times Square as a gun free zone, Tuesday, Oct. 11, 2022, in New York.

Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A federal appeals court panel said New York can continue enforcing a new state law banning guns from “sensitive” places like parks and theaters while the judges consider a legal challenge. The temporary stay from the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Wednesday puts on hold most of a ruling last month from U.S. District Judge Glenn Suddaby, who found constitutional issues with multiple portions of the law related to carrying firearms in public places and to licensing requirements. New York ad-

opted the new gun law this summer after a Supreme Court ruling invalidated the state’s system for granting permits to carry handguns outside the home. The law expanded who could get a handgun license, added new licensing requirements and created a long list of places where firearms would be banned.

Suddaby in November issued a preliminary injunction halting the state police and local officials named in the lawsuit from enforcing some provisions of the law. The appeals panel on Wednesday continued a

stay put in place a week after Suddaby’s ruling while it considers a motion from government officials opposing the injunction.

The panel’s decision makes an exception for people who have the “duty to keep the peace at places of worship, airports, and private buses.”

Among the new licensing rules Suddaby found constitutionally flawed was a provision requiring applicants to be of “good moral character,” and another that made applicants turn over information about their social media accounts. □

Croatia to join Europe's ID-check-free area, others to wait

By **STEPHEN McGRATH** and
LORNE COOK

Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — European Union countries agreed Thursday to allow Croatia to fully open its borders and participate in Europe's ID-check-free travel zone, but Bulgaria and Romania were told that they must wait longer to be allowed in. "The Schengen area is growing for the first time in more than a decade," the Czech Republic, which holds the EU's rotating presidency tweeted after a meeting of interior ministers in Brussels. "Ministers approved Croatia's membership as of 1 January 2023!"

The so-called Schengen area is the world's largest free travel zone. It comprises 26 countries 22 EU states plus Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. Almost 1.7 million people live in one Schengen country and work in another. Around 3.5 million people cross an internal border each day. Austria, in particular, had objected to Bulgaria and Romania joining, citing migration concerns. "When it comes to the accession of Romania and Bulgaria we are not united and that makes us very weak and that makes me also sad," Home Affairs Commissioner Ylva Johansson told reporters after the decision was announced. "You deserve to be full members of Schengen, you deserve to have access to the free movement in the Schengen area," Johansson said, adding that the two had strong support from almost all the ministers present. Full accession for the EU's newest members Bulgaria and Romania joined the bloc in 2007, Croatia in 2013 required unanimous support from their partners. Last month, the EU's execu-



A Croatian border police officer crosses the road at the border between Croatia and Slovenia at the Bregana border crossing, Thursday, Dec. 8, 2022.

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tive branch, the European Commission, ruled that all three candidate countries meet the technical criteria for joining, and the European Parliament has also voted in favor of their membership. Croatia's bid received no notable opposition from its EU partners, and the government in Zagreb hailed the news. Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic wrote on Facebook that, with the open borders, Croatia "has fulfilled the strategic goals of the

government" and that "citizens and the economy will have the biggest benefit." "Croatia is in Schengen!" Deputy Prime Minister Davor Božinović enthused. "There are no more borders on our European journey. We met all the conditions, went through a long and demanding process," he said. "With Croatia in Schengen, everyone benefits the citizens, the economy, Croatia and the EU." But ahead of Thursday's meeting Austria appeared almost certain to veto the

Associated Press

Bulgarian and Romanian bids over immigration, as increasing numbers of people cross its borders without authorization via the Balkans region.

Austrian Interior Minister Gerhard Karner renewed his country's staunch opposition, noting that more than 100,000 people have entered Austria this year without authorization.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte also sparked a furor last week when he alleged that Bulgarian border security officials could accept cash bribes.

Bulgarian President Rumen Radev hit back, writing on Facebook that three Bulgarian border officials have been killed in recent months while protecting the bloc's external borders.

"Instead of European solidarity," Radev said, "Bulgaria receives cynicism."

In an effort to ease their partners' concerns, Bulgaria and Romania invited EU fact-finding missions with national experts twice in recent months to see how things have improved.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said his country has a clear position: "We want Croatia, Bulgaria and Romania to be fully part of the Schengen area and will continue to work for that." □

Israel's Netanyahu moves closer to forming far-right cabinet

By **ELEANOR H. REICH**

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's designated prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, reached a coalition deal Thursday with an ultra-Orthodox party, bringing him a step closer to forming what is expected to be the most right-wing and religious government in the country's history.

The Shas party has been a longtime ally of Netanyahu's Likud. Its base consists of working class religious Jews of Middle Eastern descent and it promotes a religious and social agenda. The party has no female representatives.

Netanyahu already has

reached coalition deals with three far-right factions whose agendas include expanding West Bank settlements, tougher punishment for Palestinian attackers and anti-LGBTQ proposals. Under the latest deal, the Shas party will control or hold senior posts in ministries for religious services, social affairs, education and interior affairs.

The party head, Aryeh Deri, will serve half a term as the minister of health and interior affairs, before becoming finance minister. He will also hold the post of deputy prime minister.

Last year, Deri was convicted for tax offenses as part of a plea deal and placed

on probation. To allow him to serve as a Cabinet minister, the new government will have to approve new legislation overturning current laws that prohibit a convict on probation from holding the post.

The legal maneuver has drawn criticism that it undermines Israel's democratic institutions. It "makes a mockery of this criminal procedure," said Amir Fuchs, senior researcher at the Israeli Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank.

Likud and its ultra-Orthodox and far-right partners captured a majority of seats in the Knesset, or parliament, in Nov. 1 elections, putting



Member of Knesset Aryeh Deri waves during the swearing-in ceremony for Israeli lawmakers at the Knesset, Israel's parliament, in Jerusalem, Tuesday, Nov. 15, 2022.

Associated Press

them in position to form a new government.

Netanyahu has until midnight on Monday to form

a coalition, though he can ask the country's figure-head president for a two-week extension. □

Ousted Peru leader appears in court to face rebellion charge

By **FRANKLIN BRICEÑO** and **JOSHUA GOODMAN**

Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Peru's stunning political crisis grinded forward Thursday, as former President Pedro Castillo appeared in court following a failed attempt to close a hostile congress and his successor looked for ways to unite the country behind institutions gutted by endemic corruption and mistrust.

At his initial court appearance, Castillo looked downcast as he gave simple yes or no answers and his attorney argued that he had been arbitrarily ousted from Peru's presidency on trumped-up charges of rebellion.

The U.S. condemned Castillo's power grab as illegal and even leftist allies have refused to speak out against his overthrow. A major exception was Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who called Castillo's removal a "soft coup" fueled by deep-seated racism against the former school teacher from the heavily indigenous Andean highlands.

"It is no longer military intervention," said López Obrador. "It's done with control of the media by the oligarchs, undermining legal and legitimately constituted authorities, especially if they want to do something for the benefit of the long-suffering people who do not belong to the elites."

Meanwhile, Castillo's successor, like many Peruvians,



Peru's ousted President Pedro Castillo is escorted by police at the police station where he is being held in Lima, Peru, Wednesday, Dec. 7, 2022.

seemed eager to turn the page. In comments to journalists Thursday, Dina Boluarte, who served as Castillo's vice president, appealed for a "truce" from the political feuding that has paralyzed Peru for years so that she can "re-orient" the country. With polls showing Peruvians despising Congress even more than they do Castillo, she suggested that she would consider holding early elections something that requires approval of a hard-to-muster constitutional amendment.

"I know there are voices indicating early elections and this is democratically respectable," she said.

In just three tumultuous hours Wednesday, Castillo went from decreeing the dissolution of Peru's Con-

gress to being replaced by his vice president. But the threats against his government had been building throughout his nearly 17-month presidency.

The political outsider won a runoff election in June 2021 by just 44,000 votes after campaigning on promises to nationalize Peru's key mining industry and rewrite the constitution, gaining support in rural Peru.

However, once in office, he immediately stepped onto a no-holds-barred political battlefield in Peru, the South American country now on its sixth president in six years. The last one, Francisco Sagasti, had been appointed by Congress just months before Castillo's shocking victory.

But once in office he cycled through dozens of inexperi-

enced Cabinet choices, a number of whom have been accused of wrongdoing.

He also faced a hostile Congress, which first tried to impeach him last December. At the time, a relatively small group of opposition lawmakers cited an investigation by prosecutors into illicit financing of the governing party. To remove the president requires two-thirds of the 130 lawmakers to vote in favor. Only 46 voted in favor.

Congress tried to impeach Castillo again in March for "permanent moral incapacity," a term incorporated into Peruvian constitutional law that experts say lacks an objective definition and that Congress has used more than a half dozen times since 2017 to try

to remove presidents. The effort failed, this time with only 55 votes in favor.

Each time, Castillo was defiant, arguing he had done nothing wrong.

"I salute that common sense, responsibility and democracy prevailed," Castillo tweeted after the second attempt.

Then shortly before noon Wednesday, Castillo went on state television to announce the dissolution of Congress. He said elections would be held to choose new lawmakers and a new constitution would be written. Various members of his Cabinet resigned immediately and the Supreme Court and Constitutional Tribunal rejected it as an attempted coup.

The president can dissolve congress to end a political standoff but only in limited circumstances after losing two votes of confidence in Congress, which last occurred in 2019, when then President Martin Vizcarra dismissed lawmakers.

By nightfall Wednesday, Castillo was being held in the same giant police station housing reviled former President Alberto Fujimori, whose closing of Congress 30 years ago with tanks and soldiers was a far more robust show of force than Castillo's enfeebled moves to temporarily dismiss lawmakers and rule by decree. Despite the high political drama, only small clashes erupted between a handful of Castillo supporters and riot police on guard outside. □

U.N.: Mines helped to cause 159 casualties in Yemeni city

CAIRO (AP) — The United Nations said Thursday that land mines and other unexploded ordnance caused some 159 casualties in a rebel-held city in Yemen in the past six months.

Yemen is in the grips of a bloody civil war that has pitted Iranian-allied Houthi rebels against a Saudi-led coalition that backs the internationally recognized Yemeni government.

Ilene Cohn, director of the

U.N.'s mine action service, said over 50% of the casualties in the port city of Hudaidah were women and children, and called for the acceleration of de-mining across Yemen. The U.N. did not disclose how many of the 159 incidents were fatal.

The figure refers to casualties caused by landmines and "explosive remnants of war," a term that includes shells, grenades and other

deadly devices left behind by a conflict.

Land mines have been laid across Yemen since the 1960s. However there has been a surge in the use of the devices since the civil war began in 2014. Houthi rebels have widely used land mines.

According to the U.S.-based Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, Houthi land mines killed at least 122 people

between 2016 and 2018.

"Due to the difficulty of obtaining accurate estimates, these figures are likely to make up a fraction of all mine detonations involving civilians in Yemen," ACLED said in a 2018 report.

Saudi backed forces withdrew from the port of Hudaidah in 2021. The Houthi-controlled strategic city is one of the most heavily mined in Yemen.

Thousands of civilian deaths

have also been blamed on Saudi-led airstrikes, which have hit markets, health facilities and weddings during Yemen's eight year conflict. The war has killed over 150,000 since 2014, including over 14,500 civilians.

On Tuesday, a U.N. convoy Cohn was traveling in was struck by landmines on the northern outskirts of Hudaidah. No one was hurt in the incident. □

Drastic reduction in teenage pregnancy in Aruba

ORANJESTAD – A few years ago, teenage pregnancies were abundant on our island, causing concern in the community. Isabella Eman, nurse at the White Yellow Cross in the department of young mothers, told our reporter that in the most recent years, a satisfactory reduction can be noted in the amount of teenage pregnancies.

The focus group is young women, aged 14 to 20 years. The department focuses on prevention of teenage pregnancies. They do this through talks at schools, offering birth control and other methods and information to prevent teenage pregnancies.

Eman explained that the department also does home visits for teenagers who already are mothers, in order to guide them and also to prevent a second pregnancy. They help young mothers with motivation to continue school, as well as tools to care for a baby while they are enrolled in school. They also give information to young mothers about the development from 0 to 2 years old for a baby, and they advocate for the baby to receive the necessary vaccines and care.

According to White Yellow Cross' statistics, in the year 2000 there were about 200 cases of teenage preg-

nancy per year, and for the next few years, an increase was registered. In 2021, there were 45 teenage pregnancies, showing a significant reduction. "We hope that for 2022 there can be even less. We will have the data for this year in January 2023", Eman indicated.

Regarding expectations for next year, Eman commented that they will continue with prevention as well as curative work. "If a teenager has a child, OK, let's do the best that we can. We help the teenager with the process of raising a baby, help her to go to school, with her self esteem. And for the teenagers who want



to take care of themselves in order to not get pregnant, we continue offering anticonceptive services."

She commented that they will also continue with edu-

cational talks at schools, as well as in other places – institutions and organizations outside of school. "Our goal is for the information to reach all teenagers out there", she said. □

Prime minister of Aruba met with prime minister of the Netherlands regarding slavery in the region

ORANJESTAD – Recently, the prime minister of Aruba, Mrs. Evelyn Wever-Croes attended a very important meeting in Catshuis, the official residence of the prime minister of the Netherlands, regarding the topic of slavery.

The meeting was organized by the prime minister of the Netherlands, Mr. Mark Rutte. Present at this meeting was also Dutch ministers Hanke Bruins Slot, Robbert Dijkgraaf, Franc Weerwind, and Secretaries of State Alexandra van Huffelen and Maarten van Ooijen. Aside from them,

the meeting also counted with the presence of various organizations active in the Netherlands and the Caribbean region on the topic of slavery, discrimination and racism.

According to a press release, during the meeting premier Wever-Croes explained that it was very impactful to hear the organizations talk about the impact of slavery on generations of people coming from Africa and the islands, and how the effects of slavery are still current.

The meeting lasted for

four hours, during which they exchanged ideas and thought with each other about how the acknowledgement and apology from the Netherlands needs to take place for the effects of slavery in the history of our countries. But mainly about recovery and cooperation between the countries after offering an apology.

Wever-Croes explained that during the meeting she brought forward points that are important for Aruba, like the impact of transatlantic slavery – from Africa to our island – but also the



red slavery, which regards the natives who used to live on our island and that were enslaved. "We need to reflect on the red slavery which is also part of our history."

Concluding, Wever-Croes

said that it was a good meeting, and that the parties will remain in contact and dialogue to evaluate and determine the exact date on which an apology will be given if this is the case, as well as how and by whom it will be given. □

Minister of Transport visited Department of Aviation on the International Day of Civil Aviation

ORANJESTAD – On the 7th of December, International Day of Civil Aviation, minister of Transport, Integrity,

Nature and Senior Affairs, Mr. Ursell Arends paid a visit to congratulate the entire team of the Department of Aviation of Aruba, Directie Luchtvaart.

Minister Arends also thanked them for the work they carried out to ensure that Aruba can enjoy a safe air transport system. It is extremely important for the system of air transport to be trustworthy and safe, see-

ing as tourism in Aruba depends greatly on air transport. The role of Directie Luchtvaart is crucial in this. On this special day, congratulations and gratitude was also expressed to three members of Directie Luchtvaart for their years of service: Joureen Lacle vor thirty years, Etienne Bergen for 30 years, and Glenn Kelly for 25 years.

Minister Arends finished my saying: "We recog-

nize the important role of Directie Luchtvaart in the world of aviation, together with main stakeholders like AAA NV, ANSA NV, DMA, IBSL and all airlines, ground handling companies, maintenance companies and other stakeholders at the airport."

The minister expressed gratitude to all those who ensure the work in aviation is done optimally and at the highest level of security. □



The blue buoy and platform located at Palm beach undergo restoration



ORANJESTAD – On December 5, 2022, the Minister of Tourism and Public Health, Mr. Dangui Oduber, announced the restoration of the blue buoy and wooden platform located behind the RIU Antillas on Palm Beach.

In 2018, the government partnered with the RIU Antillas to renovate the blue buoy, a landmark well visited by locals and tourists.



Sadly the renovation did not last long as bad weather and natural elements destroyed all the efforts, and the landmark now needs another renovation. This time, the Minister approached the Aruba Tourism Authority for funds to give the blue buoy and surrounding platform a complete makeover. This time they will use materials that resist the harsh elements for a longer time.



For the renovation, the wooden platform will be built in the shape of an octagon and will include ladders in each corner. The government will approach local artists for a stunning art design on the buoy.

Once ready, this project will become another at-

traction where visitors can enjoy and take pictures and post these on social media, a valuable promotion for Aruba. It is a small project but with a significant impact.

Tourism remains our most important economic driver. Therefore, we should keep investing in our island. □

Gold rush! And more about the history of Aruba

ORANJESTAD - Evert Bongers, author of several publications, such as 'Augustus scur' and 'The hummingbird on the rock: And more about the history of Aruba' publishes his next book titled 'Gold Rush! And more about the history of Aruba'.

Library Director Mrs. Astrid Britten received a few copies from Mr. Bongers to add to the National collection and public library. These books will soon be available to the public.

Evert Bongers has always been very interested in Aruba's history and has pub-

lished many articles on his website (Historia di Aruba) and in the local newspapers. After his retirement, he was able to develop this interest and passion and dedicated more time to research. He can happily count on the support of his wife, Heleen Bongers, who proofreads and edits his work. "Gold rush! And more about Aruba's history is just like 'The hummingbird on the rock', a series of articles that also appeared in Amigoe di Aruba.

Mr. Bongers has delved further into some of the topics that appear in 'The Hummingbird on the Rock', such



as the Native American petroglyphs, the gold industry, and the fascinating story of World War II. New topics such as the history of the carnival, the migration to Cuba, and life in the Lago Colony will appeal to lovers of Aruban history. In

the book, the author writes about some popular, no longer existing, restaurants.

Evert Bongers spent his primary and secondary school days in Aruba and later studied French. In August 1977, he returned to

Aruba with his wife Heleen, and worked until 2005 as a French teacher and then until 2018 as dean at Colegio Arubano.

Evert Bongers dedicates this book to his father, Huibregt Pieter (Huib) Bongers. □

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our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again. For today we also received a lovely message from Christine.

She wrote to us saying: "Aruba to me is home as I've been coming here since 1989! My name is Christine Williams and I live in Bedford, NH." Thank you for sharing with us this lovely message of what Aruba means to you.



Aruba to me

ORANJESTAD — You are back and we would like to portrait you! By inviting you to send us your favorite vacation picture while enjoying our Happy Island.

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Newspaper, Caribbean Speed Printers and any of its affiliated companies to use said materials, as well as names, likeness, etc. for promotional purposes without compensation. Last but not least: check out our website, Instagram and Facebook page! Thank you for supporting our free newspaper, we strive to make you a happy reader every day again. For today we received a lovely message from Lyn C. Brubaker from Lancaster, PA.

Lyn wrote to us saying'

"Aruba to me is - opportunity. Opportunity for me to yearly re-awaken, re-fresh, re-view, re-acquaint, remember, re-start, re-evaluate my life goals upon

each re-turn to this beautiful island. Opportunity for me to witness and appreciate Aruban's as they prosper in their culture, their economy, their hospitality, their "Happy Island".

Opportunity to embrace Aruba's ecological priority on protecting the environment above the blue water and below the blue water. Opportunity to immerse myself in building long lasting friendships that blur differences in nationality. Aruba is opportunity to reach, to dream, to focus on "staying happy", even after you leave the island."

Thank you for sharing with us this wonderful message of what Aruba means to you. □



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Another Treasure of Aruba's Beaches: Sea Glass!

NOORD - It is hard to imagine this happening today, but years ago people dumped all kinds of refuse straight into the ocean, including old cars, and their household garbage, which of course included lots of glass. Over the next 30 years the pounding waves cleaned the beach, by breaking down everything but glass and pottery. The pounding waves washed the trash up and down, back and forth. Tons of polished, broken glass pieces were created by the pounding surf. These smoothened, colored glass particles then settled along the sea shore in millions, and that is why you can find these beautiful and colorful pieces on the north shore beaches of Aruba.

Especially on the strip on white sand between the famous "Natural Bridge" and the huge red anchor close to "Grapefield" beach you will be able to find your own pieces of sea glass. The sea glass that was created is the product of a very long and interesting process. It can take anywhere from 10 to 30 years to make sea glass. The name for any piece of glass that finds its way to the ocean and tumbles around in the water long enough is "Sea glass."

The colorful pieces of glass are being used for decoration, handcrafts and jewelry!

Once glass makes its way into the ocean, the glass is broken up into shards and is tumbled around in the wa-



ter, where sand and other rocks act like sandpaper to smooth out its rough edges. Sometimes as the sea glass is passed through fire, it becomes fire glass, the rarest of sea glass with certain inclusions, just like precious gems.

For years, the water beat against the different kinds of trash being dumped. Glass, household appli-

ances and even motor parts were discarded on the beach. The waves and weather conditions wore down the overwhelming amount of garbage in the water, creating millions of beautiful smooth rocks.

It's hard to believe the

short-sighted mistakes we were making that could have potentially ruined these beautiful beaches. But thanks to natural processes, the ocean transformed the trash into the sea glass.

Each colored gem on the beach has its own story.

The ruby red glass stones are typically from old car tail-lights.

Then, the sapphire rocks are the remnants of broken apothecary bottles. The most common and the easiest to find are the brown (Amstel & Polar beer), green (Heineken & Balashi beer) and clear glass which are the soft much loved "soft drink" bottles.

If you like to see the sea glass for yourself, and be in awe of the power of nature, rent a car or jeep and go explore our deserted beaches on the north side of the island. Make it a fun family day!

Even if we didn't mean to pollute the Beaches how we did, it is inspiring to see just how the earth can correct our mistakes.

Funny, how trash can change into treasures!

Everybody knows that you are not allowed to take local shells home, but the people working at the airport have no problem you taking sea glass home. A few of those pieces make great souvenirs. You can place them in a wine glass or large bottle for decoration and every time you look at it a smile will light up your face thinking back of your unforgettable Aruba vacation! □



Out of more than 20 participants, Hyro Oduber won the 'plane spotting' competition at the airport

ORANJESTAD – On the 15th of October, Aruba Airport Authority NV (AAA) proudly organized its third Spotter's Day. Since 2018, Aruba's airport recognized that there is a great interest in plane spotting on our island. More and more spotters tag Aruba's airport in their pictures, and for this reason, in 2018 the first Spotter's Day took place.

Due to the great interest received, it was decided to make Spotter's Day an annual event. After two years of absence, this year all spotters were invited to apply to take part in Spotters Day.

Interest was great, with 23 spotters participating, including one from Bonaire. Out of the 23 spotters, more than 40 images were received from different angles and showing different airlines. The selected group had to attend the necessary safety training at the airport of Aruba before the event took place, to guarantee that every participant was aware of the safety procedures at the airport when they were airside to take their pictures.

As part of the Spotter's Day, every spotter got the opportunity to send their three best pictures to the team at the airport. The pictures were available from the 16th until the 25th of November on the Facebook page of the airport for a voting competition among the followers of the airport, however, in spite of likes, the airport had some requirements that needed to be fulfilled, one of which was that it was not allowed to make external changes to the image through Photoshop, to keep the competition as fair as possible among the participants.

There were two categories, Photography Contest and Instagram Reel Contst.

The results for Photography were:



First place Hyro Oduber;
Second place Huzam Koolman;
Third place Aschwin Maduro;
Most creative Aschwin Maduro.

The results for Instagram Reels were:

First place Rashyd Maduro;
Second place Patrick Jansen;
Third place Pedro Partidas.

For the airport of Aruba it is important to continue encouraging spotters to practice their talent, to create a connection that can continue being creative in the future. The



Aruba airport is proud to be able to work with so many who have love and passion for aviation, and it is important to have a good relation with each of them. It is an honor to be able to award the spotters' talents as well as creating a positive impact in the community.

Regarding Aruba Airport

AUA Airport is one of the busiest airport in the Caribbean region, with more than 22 airlines operating for Aruba contributing to over 2.5 million passengers per year (before Covid) and with different flights to



28 different destinations around the world. AUA Airport operates steadily with more than 95 percent of visitors coming for vacation, of which 76 percent are from the United States and Canada, 9 percent from Latin America, 8 percent from Europe and 4 percent from the Dutch Caribbean until June 2022.

AUA Airport recognizes and thanks the stable economy, political climate, hospitality, diverse population and general safety of our island. AUA Airport continues expanding and improving its facilities to maintain its position as one of the most innovative airports in the region.

Find out more about AUA Airport by visiting www.airportaruba.com and connect with AUA Airport on [Twitter.com/Aruba_Airport](https://twitter.com/Aruba_Airport), [Facebook.com/ArubaAirport](https://facebook.com/ArubaAirport), [Instagram.com/arubaairport/](https://instagram.com/arubaairport/) and [Linkedin.com/ArubaAirport](https://linkedin.com/ArubaAirport). □



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

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1 Reviled 46 Tear into
6 Cellist tatters
Casals

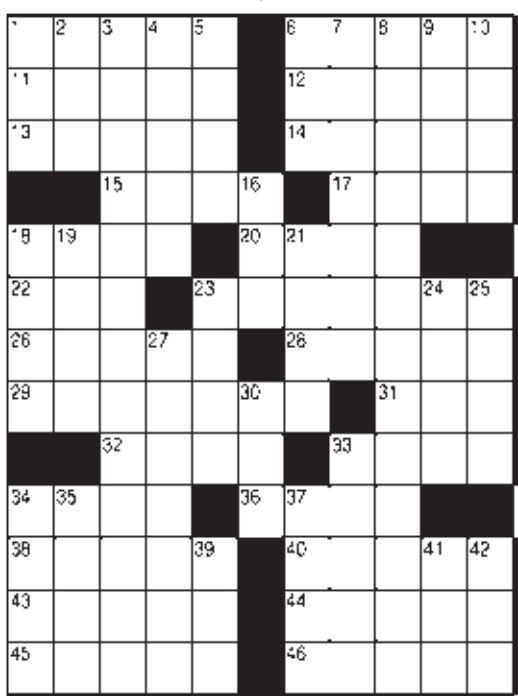
DOWN
11 Colleague of Spock and Sulu
12 Peer 1 "That's it!"
13 Tie the knot

14 Race prize 18 Takes to court 33 Welcome mat
15 Snowman's carrot 19 Waiter's aid 34 Farm sight
17 Crumb carriers 21 Important times 35 Clickable picture
18 Commotion 23 Jeans joint 37 Highlands girl
20 Truck stop fast 24 Eats 39 Acquire
sight 9 Endure over 41 Afternoon
22 Fancy vase 10 Flamenco 27 Driver's hour
cries need 42 Bright
23 Peculiar 16 Id — 30 Not pos. hue

26 Aerie builder
28 Steaming
29 Damascus natives
31 Wish undone
32 Pinnacle
33 Saloons
34 Flank
36 Dollop
38 Cake cover
40 Shady spot
43 Scoundrel
44 Public outburst



Yesterday's answer



A XYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three U's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

12-9 CRYPTOQUOTE
OHDF, OHDF, ZMDY FNPZSL
FNPJ, ZMDY TLZ PDZ QD
YPXNPJ TQ UTP'Q NPCLTZNYJS.

— FNHHNTU QMTXSQUESTLS
Yesterday's Cryptoquote: THE WORLD IS A PLACE WHERE THE EXTRAORDINARY CAN SIT JUST BESIDE THE ORDINARY WITH THE THINNEST OF BOUNDARIES. — JODI PICOULT

Yellen, Malerba become 1st female pair to sign U.S. currency

By FATIMA HUSSEIN and JOSH BOAK

Associated Press

FORT WORTH, Texas (AP) —

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Thursday helped mark a milestone in U.S. history when she held up a newly minted \$5 bill signed for the first time ever by two women.

Yellen's signature will appear alongside that of U.S. Treasurer Lynn Malerba, the first Native American in that position.

Yellen joked during a stop in Texas about the bad handwriting of some of her male predecessors and said, "I will admit, I spent some quality time practicing my signature."

"Two women on the currency for the first time is truly momentous," added Malerba, who traveled with Yellen to a Bureau of Engraving and Printing facility in Fort Worth to provide their signatures.

They ceremonially signed fresh sheets of bills in \$1 and \$5 denominations and posed with samples to mark the history-making moment. The new notes will go into circulation next year. Yellen made her reputation as a stoic chair of the Federal Reserve and a shrewd forecaster, and now is at the forefront of far-flung efforts to use economic levers to help stop Russia's war in Ukraine, employ tax policy to protect the planet from climate change and oversee a massive effort to strengthen the beleaguered IRS.

That puts her at the center of domestic and global politics, inviting new levels of pressure and second-guessing by friends and foes. She is tackling this challenge as the United



Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen, left, and Treasurer of the United States Chief Lynn Malerba show off money they autographed during a tour of the Bureau of Engraving and Printing's (BEP) Western Currency Facility in Fort Worth, Texas, Thursday, Dec. 8, 2022.

Associated Press

States is suffering from inflation that hit a 40-year high this summer and sowed fears of a coming recession. Even as Yellen watched the fresh bills carrying her signature roll out at the Bureau of Engraving and Printing's Western currency facility, her remarks focused on Biden administration policy accomplishments rather than her status as the first woman to serve as treasury secretary. On the Ukraine conflict instigated last February by Russian President Vladimir Putin, she said in prepared remarks, "Together with over 30 countries, we have denied Russia revenue and resources it needs to fight its war."

As for the domestic economy, she said, pandemic relief and a new law to boost production of semiconductors have positioned the U.S. "to capitalize on a wave of economic opportunities for the American people, including in communities often overlooked." Now, two years into Joe Biden's presidency, Yellen

has put to rest rumors she might be ready to leave the administration early and is strapping in for more economic as well as political battles ahead.

Along with managing Treasury's role in the Ukraine war, she faces the Herculean task of revitalizing an IRS that is getting a \$80 billion funding boost, and enforcing an anti-money laundering effort that requires documenting the beneficial owners of tens of millions of U.S. businesses in hopes of crushing corruption around the world. She occupies an increasingly politicized role in which Congress and foreign governments matter as much as the financial markets.

Her Treasury Department is seeking to hobble the Russian economy with an oil price cap, as House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy of California is questioning the level of U.S. support for Ukraine. The Treasury is also putting together tens of billions in tax incentives, to address climate change, that have rankled some European allies and proved controversial with Republicans. And the wage gains in the most recent U.S. jobs report suggest the economy might have to endure more pain than expected to bring inflation back to the Fed's target of 2% annually. □

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EU court: Google must delete inaccurate search info if asked

By **KELVIN CHAN**
AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Google has to delete search results about people in Europe if they can prove that the information is clearly wrong, the European Union's top court said Thursday.

The European Court of Justice ruled that search engines must "dereference information" if the person making the request can demonstrate that the material is "manifestly inaccurate."

People in Europe have the right to ask Google and other search engines to delete links to outdated or embarrassing information about themselves, even if it is true, under a principle known as "right to be forgotten."

Strict data protection rules in the 27-nation bloc give people the right to control what appears when their name is searched online, but the regulations frequently pit data privacy concerns against the public's right to know.

Google said it welcomed the decision.

"Since 2014, we've worked hard to implement the right to be forgotten in Europe, and to strike a sensible balance between people's rights of access to information and privacy," the company said in a statement.

The case stems from a complaint filed in Germany's highest court by two managers at a group of investment companies who asked Google to remove search results based on their names that linked



In this photo taken on Oct. 5, 2015 a woman walks by the entrance to the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg.

Associated Press

to articles criticizing the group's investment model. They said the articles made false claims.

Neither the managers nor the company were identified.

The pair also asked Google to remove thumbnail photos of them that came up in image searches without any context.

Google refused because it didn't know whether the articles were accurate or not, according to a press summary of the ruling.

The court disagreed, saying that if someone submits relevant and sufficient evidence proving the "manifest inaccuracy" of the information, the search

engine must grant the request. The judges said the right to freedom of expression and information can't be taken into account if "at the very least, a part which is not of minor importance of the information" turns out to be wrong.

To avoid making it too hard to get false results removed, the ruling said a court decision isn't needed and that people can "provide only evidence that can reasonably be required."

Google said the links and thumbnails in question in this particular case aren't available through web and image search anymore. "The content at issue

has been offline for a long time," it said.

"This will hopefully push Google and similar Big Tech firms to invest in a sufficiently trained and well-employed workforce capable of handling such requests, instead of outsourcing crucial content curation work to underpaid workers or an unaccountable algorithm," said Jan Penfrat, senior policy advisor at digital rights group EDRI. □



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Sharpton says film debuts at 'critical point' in U.S. politics

By AARON MORRISON

AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The Rev. Al Sharpton has been called a lot of names in his public life: a hustler, a racist, an opportunist, a fraud, a rat, a jester.

He embraces at least one of the intended insults, a name often hurled by his critics on the right and the left: "Loudmouth." That's also the title of a two-hour documentary about the national civil rights leader debuting at theaters in 50 cities Friday.

Sharpton's brash and combative styles, deployed in his advocacy for victims and families seeking accountability over police brutality and racial injustices, are on full display as filmmakers trace his evolution from Brooklyn rabble-rouser to sought-after figure in the U.S. political arena. Sharpton said he hopes the film inspires up-and-coming generations of loudmouths to join movements against injustices in their own communities.

"You had to be loud because you were not invited to address the public," he says in the documentary framed around a wide-ranging, sit-down interview. The lean physique Sharpton sat for the interview dressed in a three-piece, tailored suit and tie — a noticeable contrast to the rotund, chain and medallion wearing young man in a track suit, who many older



Director Spike Lee, left, and activist The Rev. Al Sharpton attend the premiere for "Loudmouth" during the 2022 Tribeca Festival in New York on June 18, 2022.

Associated Press

Americans may remember. The documentary opens with the civil rights leader's 2019 birthday party, which was attended by A-list celebrities and top New York elected officials. The film concludes with a tearful Sharpton leading a prayer in 2021 after a jury convicted a white, former Minneapolis police officer for the murder of George Floyd. In between those bookends, viewers see an in-depth exploration of Sharpton's upbringing by his mother, Ada Richards Sharpton, mentorship by the Rev. Jesse Jackson and soul music icon James Brown, as well as his headline-grabbing activism in New York in the 1980s.

It's arguably the most nuanced look at the leader to date.

Directed by Josh Alexander and executive produced by singer-songwriter John Legend, "Loudmouth" has already screened at the Tribeca, Chicago, Philadelphia, Martha's Vineyard and Denver film festivals. Its nationwide release comes at a "critical point" in U.S. politics, when divided government via the Republican-controlled House and the Democrat-controlled Senate could mean intensified activism around a civil rights agenda, Sharpton said. "I think it's more needed now than ever," he told The Associated Press, "the

kind of direct action and work on the ground that create the climate for protest. It's going to double our efforts."

As he wraps up 2022, Sharpton reflected on what has been a mixed, yet consequential stretch in progressive politics. On one hand, the midterm elections showed larger than expected engagement among a younger generation of voters, which blunted a predicted "red wave" in state and federal offices. By that, Sharpton said he is encouraged.

On the other hand, violence via mass shootings this year, including the massacre of Black shoppers by

a white supremacist gunman at a supermarket in Buffalo, New York, woke many up to how intractable politics on guns and racial justice can be.

"I think that the shooting showed that we were not nearly as far as we thought we were going to go after George Floyd," Sharpton said. "From the shootings in Buffalo, to the synagogue attacks, to the LGBTQ attack (in Colorado Springs), there's widespread violent hate out there."

"We're going to have to have strong, hard enforcement legislation," he added. Alexander, the director, said whether viewers come out of the film loving or hating Sharpton, they will go away understanding what the leader was up against.

"If he's saying the same things now that he's been saying for decades, but now he's celebrated and back then he was castigated, what does that tell us not about him but about the media ecosystem at the time?" Alexander told the AP. It took Sharpton more than two decades to get there. Born in 1954 in Brooklyn, he showed promise as a preacher at age 4 and was ordained as a minister by age 10. At 13, Jackson appointed Sharpton as youth director of New York's Operation Breadbasket, an anti-poverty project of the Rev. Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. □

Celine Dion cancels shows because of stiff person syndrome



Singer Celine Dion performs during her Courage tour in Quebec City on Sept. 18, 2019.

Associated Press

The Associated Press

Celine Dion has put a halt on all performing after being diagnosed with a rare neurological disorder.

In an emotional video messages posted in French and English on Thursday on Instagram, Dion said stiff person syndrome was causing spasms that affect her ability to walk and sing. "Unfortunately, the spasms affect every aspect of my daily life, sometimes causing difficulties when I walk and not allowing me to use my vocal cords to sing the way

I'm used to," she said.

Dion said she had no choice but to postpone her "Courage" tour, which was to restart in February after several delays. Her spring 2023 shows have been moved to 2024 and her summer 2023 concerts have been canceled.

"I miss seeing all of you, being on the stage, performing for you. I always give 100% when I do my shows, but my condition is not allowing me to give you that right now," she said.

Stiff person syndrome

causes rigid muscles and painful muscle spasms, which can be triggered by such things as loud noises or light touch.

The cause isn't known but it is thought to be an autoimmune disorder. Severe cases can cause difficulty walking and hunched posture.

Dion, who has five Grammy Awards and two Academy Awards, is the best-selling female artist of all time with hits like "I'm Alive" and "My Heart Will Go On." □

USC QB Caleb Williams voted AP Player of the Year

By **GREG BEACHAM**

AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Southern California quarterback Caleb Williams is The Associated Press college football player of the year, becoming the school's first winner of the award since 2005 with his stellar debut season for the Trojans.

Williams received 32 of the 46 first-place votes and 117 total points from AP Top 25 poll voters to win the award presented by Regions Bank. The Heisman Trophy favorite finished well ahead of TCU quarterback Max Dugan, who came in second with six first-place votes and 64 points.

Ohio State quarterback C.J. Stroud was third, with Tennessee's Hendon Hooker in fourth and Georgia's Stetson Bennett fifth.

Alabama linebacker Will Anderson Jr., the first repeat SEC Defensive Player of the Year, was the only non-quarterback in this year's top eight vote-getters, finishing sixth after coming in fourth last season.

Stroud and Hooker got two first-place votes apiece, while one first-place vote each went to Bennett, Anderson and star running backs Bijan Robinson of Texas and Blake Corum of



Southern California quarterback Caleb Williams smiles after USC defeated Notre Dame 38-27 in an NCAA college football game Saturday, Nov. 26, 2022, in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

Michigan.

The clear favorite was Williams, the elusive passer and runner with an electrifying arm and strong leadership skills. The sophomore followed Lincoln Riley from Oklahoma to the West Coast last winter, and the duo immediately returned USC (11-2) to national prominence with a seven-win improvement on last season's record.

Williams has passed for

4,075 yards with an FBS-leading 37 touchdowns and just four interceptions this season, completing 66.1% of his passes while winning the Pac-12's Offensive Player of the Year award. His ability to avoid defensive pressure has bordered on the supernatural at times, and he has racked up 372 yards rushing and 10 touchdowns while setting the USC school records for total touchdowns and total

offensive yards (4,447) in a season.

"I think he's just elegant in the way he plays the game," USC receiver Kyle Ford said. "That's the only word to describe it. He's out there and he's in the backfield, zigzagging around and doing spin moves, and he doesn't get touched and has a first down, and he's out of bounds. Stuff like that is amazing to me, stuff that he pulls off during a

game. He's a gamer, and he's a winner."

Perhaps most impressively, Williams has played a critical role in bringing cohesion, teamwork and 11 victories to a program returning from a four-win season with a new coaching staff and more than two dozen veteran player additions through the transfer portal. Although he usually deflects questions about his own play by praising his teammates, Williams admits leadership "means everything" to him.

"I've been trying to lead more," he added. "Being in a position where you can go and do something bigger, or do something that you've always dreamed of as a child, it brings that understanding that the time is right now."

From his first weeks in Los Angeles, Williams welcomed the responsibility of organizing and motivating this group of new teammates. He swiftly cemented friendships across the roster with his charisma and upbeat personality.

"A guy who genuinely cares, is supportive in every way, really tries to be a guy that brings people together. It's a brotherhood to him." □

AP source: Bogaerts to Padres for 11 years, \$280 million

By **RONALD BLUM and**

JAY COHEN

AP Baseball Writers

SAN DIEGO (AP) — The San Diego Padres and Xander Bogaerts agreed to a blockbuster \$280 million, 11-year contract Wednesday night, adding the All-Star slugger to an already deep lineup.

A person familiar with the negotiations confirmed the contract to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because it was pending a physical.

The Padres already had Fernando Tatis Jr. at shortstop, but he missed the entire season because of injuries and an 80-game

suspension for testing positive for a performance-enhancing drug. San Diego also met with Aaron Judge and Trea Turner before the big stars opted for different teams. The Padres reached the NL Championship Series this year before losing to the Phillies.

"From our standpoint, you want to explore and make sure we're looking at every possible opportunity to get better," general manager A.J. Preller said before the Bogaerts deal surfaced. "We've got a real desire to win and do it for a long time." The 30-year-old Bogaerts was one of the headliners in a stellar group

of free-agent shortstops that also included Turner, Carlos Correa and Dansby Swanson.

Bogaerts, who's from Aruba, terminated his \$120 million, six-year contract with Boston after the season. The four-time All-Star forfeited salaries of \$20 million for each of the next three years after hitting .307 with 15 homers and 73 RBIs in 150 games.

Bogaerts is a .292 hitter with 156 homers and 683 RBIs in 10 big league seasons — all with Boston. He helped the Red Sox win the World Series in 2013 and 2018.

Bogaerts becomes the latest veteran hitter to de-



Boston Red Sox's Xander Bogaerts fields the ball hit by Minnesota Twins' Luis Arraez during the fifth inning of a baseball game Aug. 31, 2022, in Minneapolis.

Associated Press

part Boston after the Red Sox traded Mookie Betts to the Los Angeles Dodgers in February 2020. Rafael Devers has one more year of arbitration eligibility before he can hit the market.

Bogaerts had his best big

league season in 2019, batting .309 with a career-best 33 homers and 117 RBIs. He had 23 homers and 103 RBIs in 2018. In 44 postseason games, Bogaerts is a .231 hitter with five homers and 16 RBIs. □

House report: Snyder had role in 'toxic' Commanders culture



The Washington Commanders football team's name and logo is seen at the NFL football team's facility in Ashburn, Va., Nov. 10, 2022.

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Washington Commanders created a "toxic work culture" for more than two decades, "ignoring and downplaying sexual misconduct" and what former female employees described as hundreds of instances of sexual harassment by men at the top levels of the organization, according to a report published Thursday by the U.S. House Committee on Oversight and Reform.

Commanders owner Dan Snyder was involved in the misconduct, according to the report, which said he inappropriately touched a former employee at a dinner, had staffers produce a video "of sexually suggestive footage of cheerleaders," and ordered that women who were auditioning to be cheerleaders walk on the field "while he and his friends gawked from his suite through binoculars."

The House committee opened its investigation in October 2021 after the NFL did not release a written report of an independent review of the team's workplace culture. The review by attorney Beth Wilkinson was completed in summer 2021 and resulted in a \$10 million fine to the team.

Using hearings, interviews and depositions to create its report, the House oversight committee said Snyder interfered in Wilkin-

son's investigation, which stemmed from former employees alleging in 2020 rampant sexual harassment by team executives. Snyder also conducted a separate shadow investigation, which the report said was used by his lawyers to "cast him as the victim of a defamation campaign ... and deflect responsibility for the team's toxic work culture." The team owner also interfered with the House committee's investigation by "intimidating witnesses," "refusing to release former employees from their confidentiality obligations" and using a "secret" agreement with the NFL to block access to more than 40,000 documents collected during Wilkinson's review, according to the report.

The House committee also said Snyder was evasive, misleading and said more than 100 times he did not recall things during his deposition. The NFL was not shielded from criticism in the committee's report, which said the league "misled the public about its handling of the Wilkinson Investigation" and "has not sought true accountability for those responsible." The report also said the NFL doesn't ensure "that its own workplaces are free from discrimination and harassment," citing the fact that the NFL does not require teams to report confidentiality and

nondisclosure agreements to league headquarters. The NFL did not immediately respond to messages seeking comment.

Legal counsel for the Commanders and Snyder, John Brownlee and Stuart Nash, said in a statement the committee's work was "one-sided" and there were "no new revelations" in Thursday's report. The legal counsel also said the team is "proud of the progress it has made in recent years in establishing a welcoming and inclusive workplace, and it looks forward to future success, both on and off the field."

Republicans have long considered the House oversight committee's work on the topic a partisan affair and have said they would immediately drop the case once they take control of the House in early 2023. Kentucky Republican Rep. James Comer, a ranking member, reiterated that desire in a statement Thursday, adding that the investigation was "a misuse of resources" and was meant to "gain cheap headlines and ignore any information that did not align with (Democrats') predetermined narrative."

Women who had worked for the Commanders testified to the House committee in February that they were regularly subjected to sexual comments or harass-

ment. A former director of marketing estimated it happened more than 200 times to her, a former business development employee said it was "over 100 times" "almost a part of my everyday experience" and a former marketing coordinator said her boss harassed her "over 500 times."

Lisa Banks and Debra Katz, who represented more than 40 ex-Commanders employees, said in a statement Thursday that the "committee's work resulted in important legislation limiting the use of non-disclosure agreements, which will help prevent this type of widespread harassment from happening in other American workplaces."

Banks and Katz are referring to one of two bills introduced in June by ranking committee member Rep. Carolyn Maloney, a Democrat from New York. The other bill stipulates that employers would need consent for taking and using images of employees; neither have gone beyond being referred to a committee. The NFL also has a current investigation into the Commanders, which came about after the House committee heard testimony from a former team employee that Snyder groped her at a team dinner and tried to force her into his limousine. Snyder has denied those claims.

The Associated Press does not identify alleged victims of sexual assault or harassment unless they've granted permission.

Former U.S. Attorney Mary Jo White is running that NFL investigation, which also involves claims of financial improprieties by a former vice president of sales. The NFL has said White's findings will be made public.

The District of Columbia recently filed two civil lawsuits against the team including one over what the D.C. attorney general called a scheme to cheat season-ticket holders out of money. The Commanders settled with the state of Maryland, agreeing to return security deposits to former season ticket holders and pay a \$250,000 penalty.

All of the workplace scandals and investigations have led other team owners to question whether Snyder should be a peer, with Indianapolis Colts owner Jim Irsay saying in October there's "merit to remove" Snyder, but that it's "something we have to review." He added: "It's gravely concerning to me the things that have occurred there over the last 20 years." Snyder and wife Tanya recently hired Bank of America Securities to explore selling part or all of the team he has owned since 1999. The Commanders are worth an estimated \$5.6 billion, according to Forbes a sevenfold increase over the then-record \$800 million Snyder paid for the team in 1999.

Despite the drama and legal battles, Washington is in the playoff race for an NFC wild-card spot with a 7-5-1 record. The team has a bye this week and faces the New York Giants on Dec. 18. □

